

GENESIS

Chapter 26

God's Promise to Isaac

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

26:1–33 The events of these verses took place before the birth of Esau and Jacob. They are narrated here to highlight the fact that the birthright and blessing Jacob struggled to obtain from his father (see 25:22, 31–33; 27:5–29) involved the covenant inheritance of Abraham that Isaac had received. (CSB)

26:1 *famine...time of Abraham.* See 12:10. (CSB)

Like his father before him, Isaac lived in the Negev, in south Canaan. And like his father when famine struck, Isaac was minded to head for Egypt to seek relief. His route took him through Philistine territory, along the Mediterranean coast. (PBC)

Abimelech. Probably the son or grandson of the earlier king who bore the same name (see 20:2). (CSB)

C 97 years have passed since Abraham’s encounter with an Abimelech of the Philistines. Either “Abimelech” was a dynastic title, or this king was a descendant with the same name. (TLSB)

26:2 *appeared.* It was in Philistine territory that God appeared to Isaac and change his plans to go to Egypt. (PBC)

26:3-5 The Lord renewed the promises He previously made to Abraham. Isaac was blessed to carry on the covenant (AE 5:16-18). (TLSB)

26:3 *I will be with you.* God’s promise to be a sustainer and protector of his people is repeated often (see, e.g., v. 24; 28:15; 31:3; Jos 1:5; Isa 41:10; Jer 1:8, 19; Mt 28:20; Ac 18:10). (CSB)

the oath I swore to your father Abraham. See 22:16–18. (CSB)

26:5 *commandments ... statutes ... laws.* Legal language describing various aspects of the divine regulations that God’s people were expected to keep (see Lev 26:14–15, 46; Dt 11:1). Addressing Israel after the covenant at Sinai, the author of Genesis used language that strictly applied only to that covenant. But he emphasized to Israel that Abraham’s faith, “credited ... to him as righteousness” (15:6), proved its sincerity by being obedient to God’s will in his time and that the Israelites must follow Abraham’s example if they were to receive the covenant promises. (CSB)

26:1–5 When a severe famine forces Isaac to relocate his family, the Lord appears to him with words of comfort. In this adversity, the Lord promises to Isaac the same favor He did to Abraham: His caring

presence, land, offspring, and blessedness to all people. In times of adversity, we should not doubt the Lord's care for us. He promises that nothing will separate us from His love. • Thanks be to God that the blessing of the cross covers even our sins of doubt and forgetfulness! Lord, we praise You for Your boundless love. Amen. (TLSB)

Isaac and Abimelech

6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. **7** When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. **8** When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with[a] Rebekah his wife. **9** So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" **10** Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." **11** So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." **12** And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, **13** and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. **14** He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. **15** (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) **16** And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we." **17** So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. **18** And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. **19** But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, **20** the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. **21** Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. **22** And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." **23** From there he went up to Beersheba. **24** And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." **25** So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well. **26** When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, **27** Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" **28** They said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, **29** that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." **30** So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. **31** In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. **32** That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." **33** He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. **34** When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, **35** and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

26:6 Instructed by God's command and encouraged by His promises, Isaac changed his travel plans and remained in the land of the Philistines. (PBC)

26:7 *she is my sister* – Like his father, Abraham, Isaac doubted the Lord's protection and hid the truth regarding his wife. Cf. 12:10-20; 20:1-18. (TLSB)

It was a pathetic attempt to deceive, considering that he and Rebekah had two children. The vessels through which God transmitted and later implemented His promise were frail jars of clay, indeed. (PBC)

because she was attractive. See 12:11, 14. (CSB)

26:8 *laughing.* The word in Hebrew (a form of the verb translated “laugh” in 17:17; 18:12–13, 15; 21:6 and “mock” in 21:9) is yet another pun on Isaac’s name. (CSB)

Laughing was a polite expression for intimate teasing or flirting appropriate for married people. “Laughing” is reminiscent of Isaac’s name (cf. 17:17; 18:12-13; 21:9). (TLSB)

26:10 *might easily have lain with your wife* – Not knowing she was married, somebody else could have taken Rebekah to be his wife. (TLSB)

have brought guilt on us – Since Abimelech knew that Isaac had the Lord’s favor, Abimelech assumed that such adultery would result in guilt before God. Isaac’s sin almost caused a curse rather than a blessing to all people. In contrast to Isaac, Abimelech demonstrated thoughtfulness. (TLSB)

26:11 Although Isaac made a mockery of his faith, and although his pitiful attempt at deception put his wife and marriage in jeopardy and endangered the work of God, the Lord preserved His people and His plan. (PBC)

26:12 *sowed* – Unlike Abraham, Isaac planted and harvested crops, signaling an important change in the family’s life. The abundant harvest is a sign of God’s favor and blessing. (TLSB)

the Lord blessed him – We might have expected that God’s Creator-name would be used. It was the covenant God who was keeping His promise to this important man, reminding him that God didn’t need his dishonesty, that He was very able without Isaac’s scheming to keep His promise to bless the family of promise. (PBC)

26:13 *became rich* – In this way the Lord demonstrated faithfulness to His promise of vv. 2-5). (TLSB)

Psalm 103:10, “he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”

26:15 Ancient nomadic groups would fill in the wells of adversaries in order to drive them away (cf. 2 Kings 3:25). (TLSB)

Understandably much of the trouble centered around water rights. Water has always been a problem in Canaan, and it surely was here. (PBC)

26:16 *you are much mightier than we.* An indication that the covenant promises were being fulfilled. A similar complaint was voiced by an Egyptian pharaoh hundreds of years later (Ex 1:9). (CSB)

Isaac’s neighbors showed their spite in several ways. They stopped up the wells from which Isaac’s cattle drank, and when that failed to check his prosperity they asked him to leave. (PBC)

26:18 *names* – By reassigning the names given by Abraham, Isaac honored his father and indicated that God’s promise to Abraham continue with him. (TLSB)

26:20 *The water is ours!* In those arid regions, disputes over water rights and pasturelands were common (see 13:6–11; 21:25; 36:7). (CSB)

26:22 *the Lord has made room for us* – The fact that his servants had found water each time they attempted to dig a well was to him evidence that the Lord of the covenant was blessing Abraham’s descendants as He had promised. (PBC)

26:23 *Beersheba* – Once again Isaac moved with his large household and all his flocks, this time to Beersheba, on the edge of the desert. We are not told why he moved. Had the old rivalries with the local herdsmen over grazing right flared up again? (PBC)

26:24 *Lord has appeared* – The Lord appeared to Abraham to confirm His covenant promises after he separated from Lot in the water dispute (13:14-17). Now, to assure continuity and equal favor in this uncertain time, the Lord renewed these promises to Isaac after a similar contentious water dispute. (TLSB)

I am with you – Now he was reassured that although he would remain a stranger in the land of promise he was not alone. (PBC)

26:25 *built an altar.* After God revealed Himself, the patriarchs often built altars to the Lord in response to His gracious care (cf. 35:7). (TLSB)

Isaac had learned from his father to give God the credit not only for individual blessings of body and soul, but also for revealing his sacred truth to chosen people in each generation. (PBC)

called on the name of the LORD. Where the Lord locates His name, there is grace. Luther: “For wherever mention is made of the erection of an altar and the building of a tabernacle, there the establishment of a little church is pointed out – a church in which people came together to teach and hear the Word of God, to pray, to praise God, and sacrifice” (AE 5:78). (TLSB)

26:26 *Phicol.* Either an official title or a family name that a descendant bears here. (TLSB)

26:27 *hate me* – Isaac thus interpreted his expulsion from Gerar. (TLSB)

26:28-29 Abimelech acknowledged the superiority of Isaac because of the Lord’s favor for him. (TLSB)

Proverbs 16:7 tells us: “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” One day at Beersheba Isaac experienced the truth of this proverb when he received a surprise visit from the king of Gerar with two of his top officials. Even after Isaac had deceived them, the showed him the courtesy of permitting him to live in their land. True, they had stopped up his wells and later asked him to leave, but they had dismissed him in peace. Now they wanted an alliance of friendship, and Isaac was willing to make that. (PBC)

26:28 *let us make a covenant with you* – Initial oath in which participants invoke a curse on themselves. (TLSB)

26:29 *blessed of the Lord* – By declaring Isaac to be blessed of the Lord, Abimelech also hoped for a blessing because he acted kindly toward Isaac. He recognized and confessed that the Lord was fulfilling His promises to Isaac. (TLSB)

26:30-31 *feast...exchanged oats* – This sworn pact is binding, mutual agreement often ratified by an oath and a meal of friendship (cf. 31:53-54; Ex. 24:11). (TLSB)

26:30 *made a feast.* Covenants were often concluded with a shared meal, signifying the bond of friendship (see 31:54; Ex 24:11). (CSB)

26:34 *When Esau was forty years old, he married.* As had his father Isaac (see 25:20). Forty years was roughly equivalent to a generation in later times (see Nu 32:13). (CSB)

Isaac would have been age 100. (TLSB)

Judith ... Basemath. In addition to these two wives, Esau also married Mahalath, “sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael” (28:9). The Esau genealogy of ch. 36 also mentions three wives, but they are identified as “Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite,” “Oholibamah daughter of Anah ... the Hivite” and “Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth” (36:2–3). Possibly the lists have suffered in transmission, or perhaps alternate names or nicknames are used. It may also be that Esau married more than three wives. (CSB)

hittite – The Hittites were a powerful, diverse people whose kingdom’s center was in Asia Minor. Their religion included a pantheon of deities, foremost of which were a weather god and a sun goddess. The Canaanite names of these women (Judith and Basemath) likely indicate that this Hittite clan had adapted to Canaanite culture. (TLSB)

The chapter ends on an unhappy note involving Isaac’s older son Esau. Although he was the object of his father’s special love, Esau did not return that love. Without the knowledge of his parents and against their will, he married two Hittite wives. With this action he first of all showed disrespect for God’s wishes regarding marriage as the lifelong union of two people devoted to each other. But with his action Esau showed disrespect also for God’s promises to his grandfather and his father. Esau had little interest either in being a part of the covenant nation or in having his descendants share the promised blessings. The Hittite wives he chose were unbelievers who couldn’t train their children to love the Lord’s word and to cling to His promises. Instead they were members of Canaanite tribes who would fall under the judgment of God. (PBC)

26:35 *They made life bitter.* We are not told what the wives of Esau did. Very likely they continued to practice idolatrous religion with its abominations. (CSB)

By marrying Hittite women, Esau openly defied the tradition of the family and corrupted the line of Isaac. Cf. 24:4. (TLSB)

26:6–35 Although Isaac doubts the Lord’s protection and lies to Abimelech, the Lord provides Isaac with agricultural prosperity and the respect of local rulers. When Isaac is displaced because of a water dispute, the Lord shows His care by promising His presence. Although we sometimes lack confidence in the Lord’s providential care, He daily and richly provides for all our needs of body and soul. He is richly present with us because He has placed His name on us in Baptism and feeds us with the true body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. • For all Your gifts we thank You, dear Savior! Amen. (TLSB)